



Ahwatukee

Help sought from elected officials on freeway issues

by **Colleen Sparks** - May. 9, 2008 03:10 PM
The Arizona Republic

Whether to build the proposed South Mountain Freeway and if so, along what route, is an issue that involves a lot of players, not just in Ahwatukee Foothills.

The Arizona Department of Transportation is conducting a study of the proposed freeway on behalf of the Federal Highway Administration.

A volunteer citizens group, the South Mountain Citizens Advisory Team, will recommend whether it believes the freeway should be built or not.

Ultimately ADOT, the highway administration and Maricopa Association of Governments will recommend whether or not to build the freeway, said Tim Tait, an ADOT spokesman and freeway study team member.

ADOT and MAG will decide how much, if any federal money, should be used to build the freeway, if it's decided it should be built, Tait said. A half-cent sales tax approved by voters would contribute to the building costs, if the freeway were built, too, he said.

Some Ahwatukee residents say they think their state and federal elected officials need to get more involved to help advocate for their needs in the village. They say they are concerned the study is skimming the surface of some issues important to them, including how the freeway would affect nearby schools, how many wells would be displaced and how it would cut through South Mountain.

John Rodriguez, a Lakewood Community Association resident who is also on the citizens advisory team, is opposed to the current freeway proposal to run along the Pecos Road alignment in Ahwatukee and cut through South Mountain Park. Rodriguez invited Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon, Phoenix Councilman Greg Stanton, state House majority whip John McComish, R-Ahwatukee, state Senate majority whip John Huppenthal, R-Chandler and U.S. Rep. Harry Mitchell, a Democrat, to a freeway meeting May 21 at Pecos Community Center in Ahwatukee.

Those elected officials have opposed the proposed freeway route, as well.

Rodriguez and other Ahwatukee residents met with Mitchell in late April to talk about the freeway.

Mitchell "would be the most compassionate person and the most influential person that could direct the attention this freeway needs to the powers that be," Rodriguez said. "He asked, 'What would you like me to do?' and I said, 'Be our cheerleader, expose the lack of information.'"

Mitchell will continue to "oppose the proposed freeway alignment" and he and his staff will continue meeting with Ahwatukee residents to "hear their concerns about the proposed freeway alignment," Seth Scott, communications director/press secretary for Mitchell's offices, said in an e-mail.

However, Mitchell "cannot interfere with the independent studies of state and federal agencies," Scott said.

"Congressman Mitchell shares the concerns many Ahwatukee residents have about the freeway, and he's been working hard to make sure their voices are heard," he said. "We are eagerly awaiting the findings of the state and federal studies because we're confident that, at this point, any reasonable person who examines the proposed alignment will see that it simply doesn't work."

Tait said legally the study team has to complete an environmental impact statement before it can come up with a detailed design that shows exactly how the freeway would be built.

Chad Blostone of the Foothills HOA, also on the citizens advisory team, said he believes the proposed freeway route is unique and he wishes a detailed design could be discussed before a decision is made to build or not. Blostone hopes Mitchell can help citizens fight to correct what he considers a "deficient" freeway design.

"The only hope we have for changing that is through our policy makers," he said.